

XLVII.—*Field-notes on the Birds of British Guiana.*

By W. L. S. LOAT, F.Z.S.

HAVING long had a desire to see something of bird-life in the Tropics, I left New York for Georgetown, British Guiana, at the end of November of last year, and spent three or four months collecting in the surrounding district.

The best route is by the boats of the Quebec Steamship Company's Line, as they call at the chief islands of the Windward Group, to unload cargo, and thus enable one to spend several hours on shore. When some distance from Georgetown the colour of the ocean changes to a yellowish brown, caused by the enormous amount of fine mud brought down by the Amazons and Orinoco. Even the water of the Essequibo for some distance up from its mouth is likewise discoloured from the same cause. The coast of British Guiana seems to lie very low and is bordered by a line of trees, while every here and there one notices the tall chimneys of the sugar-estates. Several miles from the town, the vessel stops at the lightship to take on board a pilot, as the navigation at this spot is difficult, on account of the mudbanks. The first birds to be noticed as you approach Georgetown are small Gulls (*Larus atricilla*). At the landing-stage the ubiquitous *Pitangus sulphuratus* is seen, with its bright yellow breast and lively manner. This bird and its allies are generally known as the "Kiskadies," owing to the fancied resemblance in their cry to the words "Qu'est-ce qu'il dit?" I have seen this bird take fruit while on the wing, but it generally flies to a perch to eat it. *Pitangus lictor* is also fairly common, while *Myiozetetes cayennensis*, which resembles it in size and plumage, but has a much shorter bill, is rare. The "Grey-headed Tyrant-bird" (*Tyrannus melancholicus*) is also another common species.

The Botanical Gardens at Georgetown, which are of great beauty and extent, are a safe haunt for many species of Tyrannidæ and other birds. There are also two or three examples of the American tapir, kept in a semi-wild state, which have bred once or twice in confinement, the striped

appearance of the young being very marked. Mr. Jenman, the Director of the Gardens, is much interested in wild animals of all kinds. The "Seissors-tail" (*Milvulus tyrannus*) is sometimes found in the vicinity of Georgetown.

The black-headed "Carrion-Crow" (*Cathartes atratus*) is one of the commonest birds, both in and around Georgetown, and may be seen circling around in the blue sky high overhead, or perched on the roofs of the houses and markets, and even in the streets, where it will act the part of a scavenger. For this reason these birds are protected by law, though at the present time the sanitary arrangements of Georgetown are so good that their occupation has to a great extent disappeared; nevertheless the law with regard to their preservation has not been repealed. The extensive pastures (the word is used out here to denote the large tracts of more or less marshy ground, in which herds of cattle feed) form a happy hunting-ground for the "Crows," which soon espy a dead animal and immediately flock to the banquet. Having gorged themselves, they rest either on the carcass or on the ground beside it. I have seen as many as forty of them round one animal, many squatting on the grass, like our domestic Duck at home after he has had a good meal. To dissect one of these birds is anything but a pleasant occupation, and the skins retain a most disagreeable smell for months after they have been prepared. Another "Crow" (*Cathartes urubitinga*), with a bare yellowish head, is also found in the colony, and is generally seen singly or in pairs, sweeping with graceful motions, at no great distance from the ground. I have never noticed it in company, or feeding with the other "Crow."

The Herons and their allies are fairly well represented in British Guiana, the Abary and Mahareony Creeks being among their favourite haunts. The pastures are frequented by *Ardea cærulea*, both in the greyish-blue and white stages of plumage. In the latter stage there is always more or less of the greyish-blue colour present, generally at the tips of the chief primaries. I noticed that the greyish-blue birds were more difficult to approach than the rest. I saw one or

two specimens of *Ardea egretta* by the side of the Lamaha Canal. The "Chow" (*Butorides cyanurus*) is generally found near trenches and canals. It does not frequent the open marshy grounds, as is the case with *Ardea cœrulea*, but seems to be of more retiring habits.

Another common bird of the marshy lands, trenches, and canals is the "Spur-wing" (*Parra jacana*). When approached it generally flies off, uttering its sharp cry, though sometimes it will skulk in the herbage, hoping to evade notice. The enormous length of the toes and claws enables it to run over the leaves of water-lilies and other aquatic herbage with great ease. In a specimen measured, the claw of the first digit was nearly two inches long, and the spread of foot from the tip of the claw of the first digit to tip of claw of third digit about five inches. I obtained three newly-hatched young of this bird, and found that even at this early age the toes and claws were of great length. The under part of the body was entirely white, and the upper part more or less striped with black and different shades of brown not at all unlike the appearance of a young Partridge.

The magnificent Scarlet Ibis (*Eudocimus ruber*) is sometimes seen in large flocks, feeding on the mudflats of the coast. This bird used to be found distributed along the whole coast-line, but has now almost disappeared from certain places. It is still to be found near the mouth of the Corentyne River, which divides British from Dutch Guiana, and occasionally at the mouth of the Berbice, also near the mouths of the Waini and Barima, which are not far from the Orinoco. The difference between the brown plumage of the young and the scarlet of the adult of this Ibis is very remarkable.

The chief breeding-place of several of the Herons is on the Dauntless Bank, an island formed in the mouth of the Essequibo by the silting up of mud upon a schooner which was sunk there some fifty years ago. The island thus formed is now several miles long and nearly a mile wide: it is clothed all round its edge with dense vegetation, but in the middle is more open, with low bushes and

swampy ground, forming a secure retreat for a heronry. Until a law was recently passed prohibiting the exportation of plumes, the birds suffered a good deal of persecution from the feather-hunters. The Dauntless Bank is not resorted to for breeding purposes until June or July.

In January last I made a very interesting trip, accompanied by two other men, up the Lamaha Canal, and then up the Hoorabea Creek for some distance, where we camped in a "benah," which is a palm-roofed hut with open sides. Close to us was a forest of cta palms, much frequented by *Ara macuwana*, for the sake of the fruit. Every night and morning pairs of these Macaws used to fly across the creek to and from their feeding-grounds. We obtained two or three specimens of the small *Ardetta exilis* here in a patch of reedy swamp close to the camp; they allowed of a near approach before taking flight.

While paddling up the Hoorabea Creek we noticed several examples of *Donacobius atricapillus*, the "Babbling Thrush" or "Fantail," as it is sometimes called. There was also a fairly large colony of the Yellow-backed Mocking-bird (*Cassicus persicus*) within a hundred yards of our camp. We did not obtain any of the nests, as the tree from which they hung was swarming with stinging ants; the marabuntas, a species of wasp with a powerful sting, had likewise taken up their abode there. On the Lamaha Canal we found both the nests of the Scarlet-backed Mocking-bird (*Cassicus affinis*) and of *Cassicus persicus*. The two species had chosen two large bushes close to the water's edge, and about twenty yards apart, in which their nests were built. One bough contained three or four nests, all woven close together. Most of the nests of *Cassicus affinis* which we examined contained eggs, three in one nest, two in another, and the rest with a single egg each. The nests of *C. affinis* were much coarser in texture than, and of a different material from, the nests of *C. persicus*. In spite of the close proximity of the two species, they did not mix or interfere one with another in any way. On the 5th of February I obtained a fine male, a female, and nests of the "Bunyar" (*Ostinops*

*decumanus*). The male was nearly six inches longer than the female, and in many of the allied species the difference between the sexes is also very noticeable. Their nests were attached to the ends of the leaves of some coconut-palm, in a retired spot, and were nearly three feet long, made of dried grasses, &c., beautifully woven together. The attachment of the nest to the leaf was very securely made, being continued for more than two feet up from the tip. One nest contained a single young bird almost fully fledged. These "Bunyors" are very partial to the mango and other fruits, often doing a good deal of damage. They are much more shy than most of the other Icteridæ, and generally hang their nests in places difficult of access.

The "Reed-bird" (*Agelaius icterocephalus*) may often be seen here in flocks of twenty to thirty among the reeds where they build their nests. The bright yellow head of the male is in striking contrast to the rest of its black plumage. The "Robin" (*Leistes guianensis*) is common in the fields and pastures of the colony. It has a peculiar habit of flying up into the air to the height of about twenty-five feet; then, drawing its wings close to its side, it shoots obliquely downward, uttering a loud chirping kind of song, whether done from exuberance of spirits or to charm its mate, which is generally somewhere near, I cannot say. The crimson breast of an adult male is of a most beautiful tint, and is well shown when he performs this aerial movement. Another common bird of the colony is the Yellow Plantain-bird (*Icterus xanthornus*), which builds a small hanging nest. The "Blackbird" (a species of *Quiscalus*) is also very common. One generally sees a dozen or so of them about the mule- and cattle-sheds on the sugar-estates, and also in the pastures. The peculiar formation of the tail of the male of this bird is well shown when it is flying. It has the appearance of being placed almost at right angles to the long axis of the body. This species, and many others which obtain most of their food on the ground, are very often infested about the face with numbers of minute red insects, known as "bête rouge" in the colony. The irritation set

up by these creatures if they happen to get on to one's skin is very great, but the application of a little oil soon alleviates it. If you walk through the high grass, or sit down on bare ground, you are almost certain to take home several of these minute pests, but they do not seem to irritate birds in the same way as they do the human species.

The Hawks and their allies are very well represented in British Guiana. One of the commonest is *Asturina magnirostris*, and you can often recognize the presence of these birds by the peculiar kind of whistling they make. The Barred Crab-Hawk (*Buteogallus equinoctialis*), the food of which consists chiefly of lizards and crabs, is fairly abundant. The mud outside the sea-dam is simply honeycombed by crabs, affording an unlimited food-supply for this species. The trees along the rivers and creeks are the favourite haunts of other species of Hawks, such as *Tinnunculus isabellinus*, *Ictinia plumbea*, *Ibycter ater*, and *Urubitinga zonura*. The beautiful Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides furcatus*) is also found in the colony. Specimens of *Gampsonyx swainsoni* were obtained by Messrs. Quelch, MacConnell, and Lloyd on their "Savannah Trip" to Roraima in 1894. The Island of Wakenaam, at the mouth of the Essequibo, is a splendid locality for Hawks, a great number of the species found in different parts of the colony having been obtained on this island. But such birds as the Harpy (*Thrasaëtus harpyia*) and the King Vulture (*Gypagus papa*) are obtained only in the interior. On Wakenaam I procured a specimen of a pretty little Hobby (*Hypotriorchis rufigularis*); it was sitting on the bough of a dead tree near the water.

The Trumpet-bird (*Psophia crepitans*), found in the interior, is easily domesticated. A gentleman I know kept several as pets; they would come when called, and much enjoyed having their heads scratched. At the same time he would imitate the sound emitted by these birds, and they immediately started the peculiar rumbling noise, whence their name. Whether they did it from force of example, or from pleasure, it would be hard to tell.

The trip from Georgetown to Bartica up the Essequibo

is full of interest; not so much in the way of bird-life, for which one must go higher up, but for the variety of trees, creepers, and shrubs with which the banks of the river are clothed down to the water's edge. Bartica, the depôt for the principal goldfields, is situated at the junction of the Mazaroni and Essequibo. Several miles from the mouth you see wooden erections placed in the water to mark the course. Upon these one or two Scissor-bills (*Rhynchops melanura*) are nearly always to be found resting.

In the forest round Bartica I obtained the Red-billed Cuckoo (*Piaya melanogaster*) and the Brown Cuckoo (*Piaya cayana*). The way in which a specimen of the latter bird managed its long tail, while hopping about in the thick trees overhead, was wonderful: it fell wounded into some dense undergrowth, through which it slipped with the greatest ease, so that I nearly lost it.

In December I obtained a specimen of *Coccyzus minor*, but in a very worn state of plumage, especially as regards the ends of the rectrices. On Wakenaam I shot an example of the Spotted Cuckoo (*Diplopterus navius*) or "My-wife-sick," as it is sometimes called on account of its cry, which is supposed to resemble those words. This bird generally frequents low bushes. The "Old Witch" (*Crotophaga ani*) is found nearly everywhere. One may often see half-a-dozen of these birds all sitting close together on the same bush; they are also fond of skulking in the long grass, and when walking along you may be close upon them before they move. *Crotophaga major* is far less common and much more wary; the beautiful bluish iridescent colour of the back and wings makes this a handsome bird in spite of its peculiar bill. I saw a flock of about fifty of these birds in some trees bordering the Lamaha Canal, but most of them kept well out of range of the gun.

In a clearing in the forest I obtained an example of the White-rumped Barbet (*Chelidoptera tenebrosa*). It generally settles on some prominent object, such as a stump or the topmost twig of a branch of a dead tree, from which it makes short flights, reminding one of our Spotted Flycatcher.

When at rest its blackish colour, combined with its long and rather pointed wings, gives it the appearance of a Swallow without the elongated tail-feathers. In the same clearing I saw sitting at the very top of a dead tree an example of the Aracari Toucan (*Pteroglossus aracari*), but as I had run short of cartridges he was quite safe, a fact he seemed to be quite aware of.

Two or three days later I shot a young male of the Pompadour Chatterer (*Xipholena pompadora*). It was sitting at the top of a fairly tall tree. The lovely claret-colour of the adult male was just appearing on the crissum and upper breast; the peculiar bristly feathers of the wing of the old bird were wanting. This specimen was obtained on the 21st of December.

Both the "Cashew Sackie" (*Rhamphocœlus jacapa*) and the "Blue Sackie" (*Tanagra episcopus*) have a great fondness for the fruit of the guava; so, too, has the pretty little Tanager (*Calliste cayana*). I found the nest of a "Cashew Sackie" in a tall shrub, containing three eggs. The "Palm Sackie" (*Tanagra palmarum*) is another common British Guiana bird.

The Dendrocolaptidæ or "Woodhewers" are fairly well represented in the Colony, and found in more or less wooded districts. Of Kingfishers, the large species (*Ceryle torquata*) was seen several times up the Lamaha Canal, the Hoorabea Creek, and also on some telegraph-wires which ran along near a trench. *Ceryle inda* and *C. americana* are found on the Mazaruni River.

I obtained examples of only two or three species of Trochilidæ. The Mango Humming-bird (*Lampornis violicauda*) was one of the commonest, though such beautiful species as *Chrysolampis moschitus*, with its ruby head and golden throat, and *Thalurania furcata*, with its emerald chin and purple breast, are found in the colony.

The Speckled Ground-Dove (*Chamæpelia passerina*) is fairly common, and generally to be seen in pairs, running about quickly on the ground. When disturbed they fly for a short distance and then alight; this they repeat several times,



and then fly off to a safe distance. The wild fruits attract the Common Pigeon (*Columba rufina*) sometimes in great numbers; they are generally fat and make very good eating.

The Formicariidæ or Ant-Thrushes are fairly well represented in Guiana. In walking through the bush one often comes to a spot where a dozen or more of these birds may be seen hopping and twittering about in an excited manner among the undergrowth, the ground below swarming with ants. The Golden Warbler (*Dendræca æstiva*) is called the "Canary" in British Guiana, rather on account of its bright yellow colour, I should surmise, than from its song, which is not of the first order.

The Sanderling (*Calidris arenaria*) visits the colony in great numbers. The Spotted Sandpiper (*Tringoides macularius*) frequents the partially-flooded meadows and sides of trenches. The Turnstone (*Streptilas interpres*) also visits the colony. Some years ago the American Golden Plover (*Charadrius dominicus*) afforded very good shooting, but I was informed that the last few seasons they have not been plentiful.

No remarks on the birds of British Guiana would be complete without reference to that most peculiar bird the *Opisthocomus cristatus*, called variously the "Hoatzin," "Hanna," "Canje Pheasant," and "Stink-bird." I must say that I never found the smell of these birds so bad as I had been led to believe; it reminds one of a rather strong cow-shed. It has been found that on cutting out the crop, as soon as the bird is dead, very little unpleasant odour remains. I obtained all my specimens close to a creek, at the back of Albion Plantation, in the Berbice district. There must have been a score of the birds in a clump of tall thorny bushes, and at the first shot several of them tumbled (I can hardly say they flew) out of the bushes on to the branches of a tree which was growing in the middle of the clump. After a couple more shots they tumbled back again into the bushes for safety. Of the four birds obtained on the 4th of January all were moulting.

The species mentioned in this paper are only a small pro-

portion of those that have been recorded from the colony: see Salvin's list ('The Ibis,' 1885-1886), in which about 620 species are catalogued. To make a representative collection of them would require years of work, but would well repay anyone who had the time and means for carrying it out.

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XLVIII.—*On a Collection of Birds from Fort Chiquaqua, Mashonaland.* By J. LAWRENCE SOWERBY. *With Notes by R. BOWDLER SHARPE, LL.D., &c.*

(Plate XII. fig. 1.)

[AFTER the suppression of the late rebellion in Mashonaland, Mr. Sowerby was in command of a detachment of the B.S.A. Mounted Police at Fort Chiquaqua, and was able for the first time to study the birds of the district. Very little has been written about the ornithology of Mashonaland: the principal essays on the subject are the following:—

SHELLEY, G. E.—*On a Collection of Birds made by Mr. J. S. Jameson in South-eastern Africa, with Notes by Mr. T. AYRES.* *Ibis*, 1882, pp. 236-265, 349-368, pl. vii.

MARSHALL, GUY A. K. *Notes on a small Collection of Birds from Mashonaland.* *Ibis*, 1896, pp. 241-246.

When it is remembered that, owing to the difficulties of transport, the collector could seldom obtain any shot except pellets of large size, and that Mr. Sowerby's collecting had to be done with a Lee-Metford rifle, the excellent condition of his skins is really wonderful. The new Barbet described below was killed with his rifle, as well as the Honey-Guide, and perhaps the tough skins of these species facilitated their preservation; but it is not given to every young ornithologist to shoot a Hoopoe with a bullet, and then to make a good skin of it.

The principal interest in the present collection consists in the discovery of several species in Mashonaland identical with Angolan forms, such as *Melierax mechowii* and *Monticola*